

SB 111 An Act Concerning The Penalty For Causing Harm To A Vulnerable User Of A Public Way

I am fortunate to have survived this incident and to be here to testify today, solely because I was riding a horse who saved my life at the expense of his own. I am still receiving medical treatment for injuries I sustained from this incident. Trapper Jake Mint was a road safe, trail safe, child safe, dressage and patrol horse. He was one of the first horses on the CT Horse Council's Volunteer Horse Patrol.

After Trapper's death I became aware of how many incidents of death and injury to people and animals along Connecticut's highways occurred. And what a very large problem it had become. Astonishingly there are often no consequences to the drivers who cause the harm. I would like to share my tragic story with the hope that something like this will never happen again.

Seven months ago, Trapper and I were riding home along Olde Orchard Road in Clinton, speed limit of 25 mph. We were on a straight and open section of the road walking next to the curb on the right side of the road. I heard a vehicle approaching, I turned to my left to acknowledge the vehicle with my usual friendly wave. As I turned, I saw the speeding Dodge Durango approach and swerve toward me. I screamed "Oh my God, you're going to hit me!" as the vehicle struck both Trapper and me. The vehicle hit Trappers left side as well as my left leg. We were thrust into a tree where I was impaled by a branch on my right side. Trapper's left front leg was amputated above the hoof at the fetlock joint by the vehicle.

Trapper stood quietly, occasionally shaking the leg with his hoof dangling by skin and blood pouring out. I was in shock and disbelief. I am a veterinarian and there was nothing I could do to help my horse.

The driver stopped quite a distance past the point of impact. The first police officer on the scene was the driver's father. Emergency personnel and another Clinton police officer arrived. Two off-duty state troopers were there. I begged to have Trapper shot immediately. They refused because it was a residential neighborhood.

We made every attempt to find an available equine veterinarian to euthanize my horse. At this point, we again asked the police to shoot Trapper. Unfortunately, the police are not trained for these types of emergencies and the officer had to shoot Trapper four times before he died, approximately 1 ½ hours after the accident. It was horrific. The driver was very fortunate as he was sent home before my horse was shot and thus did not have to witness the terrifying and tragic end of his actions. My husband took me to the emergency room.

The driver's statement says he could not see me and was "blinded by the sun". I was wearing a fluorescent lime green shirt and had a blaze orange poncho over Trapper's rump. What if I was walking next to Trapper, riding my bike, or walking my dog? What if this was YOUR child walking along the side of the road?

The driver's statement says he stopped because he thought he hit a mailbox or garbage can, thereby acknowledging that he thought he was driving off the road and out of control. How could he mistake a 1000 pound animal for a garbage can or mailbox? Was the driver texting or using his cell phone?

The only consequence to the driver who struck another human being, as well as killed a horse by driving out of control was a VERBAL WARNING for not passing an equestrian safely. Is this the message that we want to give to other drivers: That hitting someone while driving is just an accident and please don't do it again?

This is why I support this bill.

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